MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES

annual report 1998/1999

BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Ministry of Human Resources

Annual Report 1998-99

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The Honourable Garde Gardom
Lieutenant Governor
The Province of British Columbia

May it please your honour:

On July 21, 1999, the Ministry of Human Resources, along with components of other ministries were brought together under the new Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.

It is a pleasure to submit to you, as Minister of Social Development and Economic Security, the annual report for the Ministry of Human Resources for the period of April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999.

Jan Pullinger
Minister of Social Development
and Economic Security

The Honourable Jan Pullinger
Minister of Social Development and Economic Security
The Province of British Columbia

Dear Minister:

It is a pleasure to submit to you, as Deputy Minister of Social Development and Economic Security, the annual report for the Ministry of Human Resources for the period of April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999.

Mike Corbeil
Deputy Minister of Social Development
and Economic Security

Ministry of Human Resources Expenditures, 1998-99 (millions)

	Salaries and Benefits	Operating Costs	Asset Amortization	Grants and Contributions	Other Expenditures	Recoveries	Total Expenditures
Minister's Office	0.36	0.02					0.38
Program Operations							
BC Benefits Program Operations	93.69	35.94	4.94	0.02	0.06		134.65
BC Benefits Programs							
Disability Benefits Level II				262.04			262.04
Hardship Assistance				63.41		-7.34	56.07
Health Care and Dental Services				55.46			55.46
Amortization Expense			3.54				3.54
Total Expenditures	114.21	51.18	5.26	1,393.93	13.73	-14.66	1,563.64

Ministry Operations—This vote provides for assistance to help people in British Columbia achieve economic security through attachment to the labour market and when necessary, income support and related services including health care and dental services, to those in need, as follows:

(a) **Program Operations** - This sub-vote provides for:

(i) **Corporate Services**—provides for direct operating costs relating to the overall direction, development and support of ministry programs. This includes the ministry executive, communications, policy, research and performance measurement, personnel services and staff training, financial operations, financial planning, information technology services, facilities and records management. Also provides for emergency social services co-ordination and delivery, ministry requirements for postal services and office furniture and equipment, and banking services. Recoveries are received from ministries for services provided on their behalf and from parties external to government for ministry services;

(ii) **BC Benefits Program Operations**—provides for the direct operating costs of delivering income support programs, including labour market attachment services, to eligible individuals and families in need. This includes administration of benefits and services authorized under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* and Regulation, *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and Regulation, and *Disability Benefits Program Act* and Regulation, and for other services delivered directly or by other ministries. Grants and contributions are paid in support of these activities; and

(iii) **Health Services Program Operations**—provides for the direct operating costs of delivering health care and dental services to eligible recipients under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* and Regulation, *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and Regulation, and *Disability Benefits Program Act* and Regulation, and for other ministry health services.

(b) **BC Benefits Programs**—This sub-vote provides for:

(i) **Income Assistance**—provides for income support to persons eligible under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* who do not qualify under Disability Benefits or Youth Works. Includes support for individuals participating in job search and job search training under the Welfare to Work Program and in other labour market attachment services delivered directly or by other ministries;

(ii) **Disability Benefits Level II**—provides for income support and labour market attachment services to persons eligible under the *Disability Benefits Program Act*;

(iii) **Youth Works**—provides for living allowances, which are provided on behalf of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, to persons eligible under the *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and includes support for persons participating in job search and job search training;

(iv) **Hardship Assistance**—provides for temporary income support, under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act*, to eligible individuals while in need who do not qualify for regular Income Assistance, Disability Benefits or Youth Works allowance;

(v) **Administered Assistance and Benefits**—provides for community based support services which complement and support ministry programs including the Community Services Fund, hostels and emergency shelters, home support workers, pre-employment programs, interpreter and translation services, and payment of user fees on behalf of eligible persons for continuing care and alcohol and drug rehabilitation. Also provides for other in-kind-benefits such as fees for identification documents, and costs incurred under the Family Maintenance Program on behalf of eligible clients.

Direct income support benefits are paid as grants to eligible recipients. Grants and contributions are also paid for the provision of Administered Assistance and Benefits. Recoveries are received from the federal government and from assignments authorized by legislation, from repayable benefits and overpayments, and from agencies contributing to or sharing in the cost of sponsored services.

(c) **Health Care and Dental Services**—This sub-vote provides for medical goods and services, medical transportation, diet and natal allowances, and dental and optical services for eligible individuals and families qualifying for benefits under BC Benefits Programs. Benefits are paid as grants and contributions to service providers, or as direct grants to eligible individuals as appropriate. Recoveries are received from repayable benefits and overpayments.

Ministry of Human Resources Expenditures, 1998-99 (millions)

	Salaries and Benefits	Operating Costs	Asset Amortization	Grants and Contributions	Other Expenditures	Recoveries	Total
Minister's Office	0.36	0.02					0.38
Ministry Operations							
Program Operations							
Corporate Services	**18.33**	**13.90**	**1.55**	**0.01**	**0.91**	**-0.01**	**34.69**
BC Benefits Program Operations	93.69	35.94	4.94	0.02	0.06		134.65
Health Services Program Operations	**1.83**	**1.32**	**0.12**				**3.27**
BC Benefits Programs							
Income Assistance				**819.24**		**-7.31**	**811.93**
Disability Benefits Level II				262.04			262.04
Youth Works				**141.46**			**141.46**
Hardship Assistance				63.41		-7.34	56.07
Administered Benefits and Services				**52.28**	**12.76**		**65.04**
Health Care and Dental Services				55.46			55.46
Tangible Capital Assets			**-4.89**				**-4.89**
Amortization Expense			3.54				3.54
Total Expenditures	114.21	51.18	5.26	1,393.93	13.73	-14.66	1,563.64

Ministry Operations - This vote provides for assistance to help people in British Columbia achieve economic security through attachment to the labour market and when necessary, income support and related services including health care and dental services, to those in need, as follows:

(a) **Program Operations** - This sub-vote provides for:

(i) **Corporate Services** - provides for direct operating costs relating to the overall direction, development and support of ministry programs. It includes the ministry executive, communications, policy, research and performance measurement, personnel services and staff training, field operations, financial planning, information technology services, facilities and records management. As provides for employer contributions, co-ordination and delivery, ministry requirements for postal services and office furniture and equipment, and banking services. Recoveries are received from ministries for services provided on their behalf and from parties external to government for ministry services.

(ii) **BC Benefits Program Operations** - provides for the direct operating costs of delivering income support programs, including labour market attachment services, to eligible individuals and families in need. This includes administration of benefits and services provided under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* and Regulation, *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and Regulation, and Disability Benefits under the Regulation, for other services delivered directly or by other ministries. Grants and contributions are paid in support of these activities and

(iii) **Health Services Program Operations** - provides for the direct operating costs of delivering health care and dental services to eligible persons under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* and Regulation, *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and Regulation, and Disability Benefits Regulation, and for other ministry health services.

(b) **BC Benefits Programs** - This sub-vote provides for:

(i) **Income Assistance** - provides for income support to persons eligible under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act* who do not qualify under Disability Benefits or Youth Works. Includes support for individuals participating in job search and job-related training under the Job Connections Program and in other labour market attachment services delivered directly or by other ministries.

(ii) **Disability Benefits Level II** - provides for income support and labour market attachment services to persons eligible under the *Disability Benefits Program Act*.

(iii) **Youth Works** - provides for living allowances, which are provided on behalf of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, to persons eligible under the *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and includes support for persons participating in job search and job-related training.

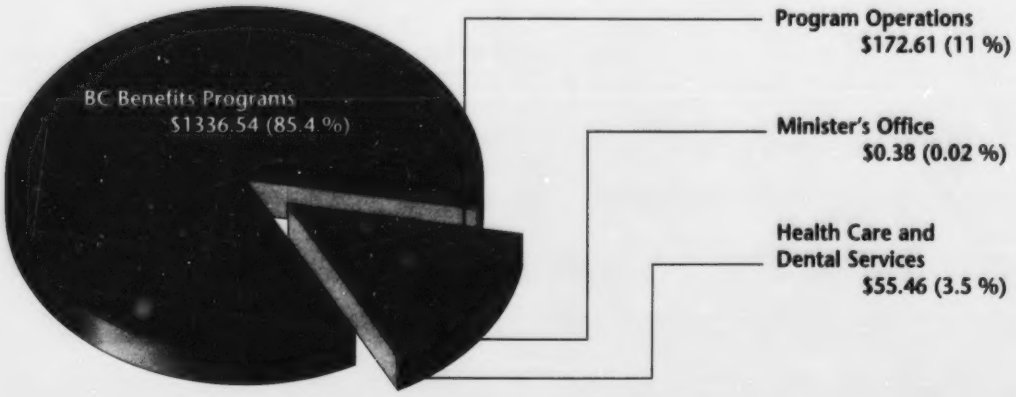
(iv) **Hardship Assistance** - provides for temporary income support, under the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act*, to eligible individuals who do not qualify for regular Income Assistance, Disability Benefits or Youth Works allowance.

(v) **Administered Assistance and Benefits** - provides for community based support services which complement and support ministry programs, including the Community Services Fund, hostels and emergency shelters, home support workers, pre-employment programs, interpreter and translation services, and payment of user fees on behalf of eligible persons for continuing care and alcohol and drug rehabilitation. Also provides for other in-kind-benefits such as fees for identification documents, and costs incurred under the Family Maintenance Program on behalf of clients.

Direct income support benefits are paid as grants to eligible recipients. Grants and contributions are also paid for the provision of Health Assistance and Benefits. Recoveries are received from the federal government and from assignment authorized by legislation from benefits and overpayments, and from agencies contributing to or sharing in the cost of sponsored services.

(c) **Health Care and Dental Services** - This sub-vote provides for medical goods and services, medical transportation, diet and nutritional supplements, dental and optical services for eligible individuals and families qualifying for benefits under BC Benefits Programs. Benefits are paid as grants, contributions to service providers, or as direct grants to eligible individuals as appropriate. Recoveries are received from repayable benefits and overpayments.

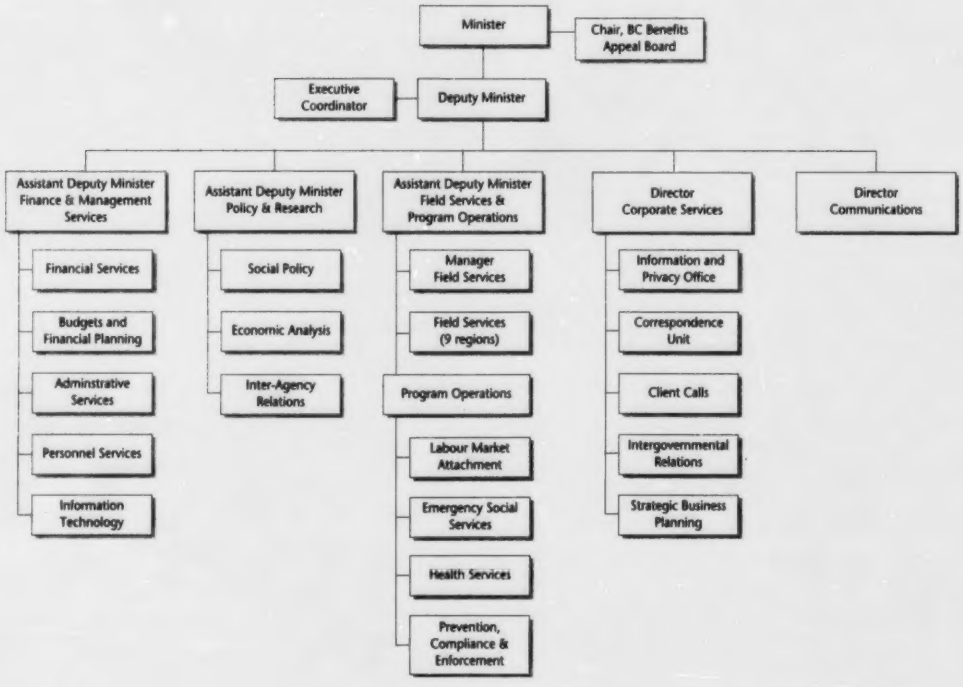
Ministry of Human Resources
Expenditures, 1998-99 (millions)

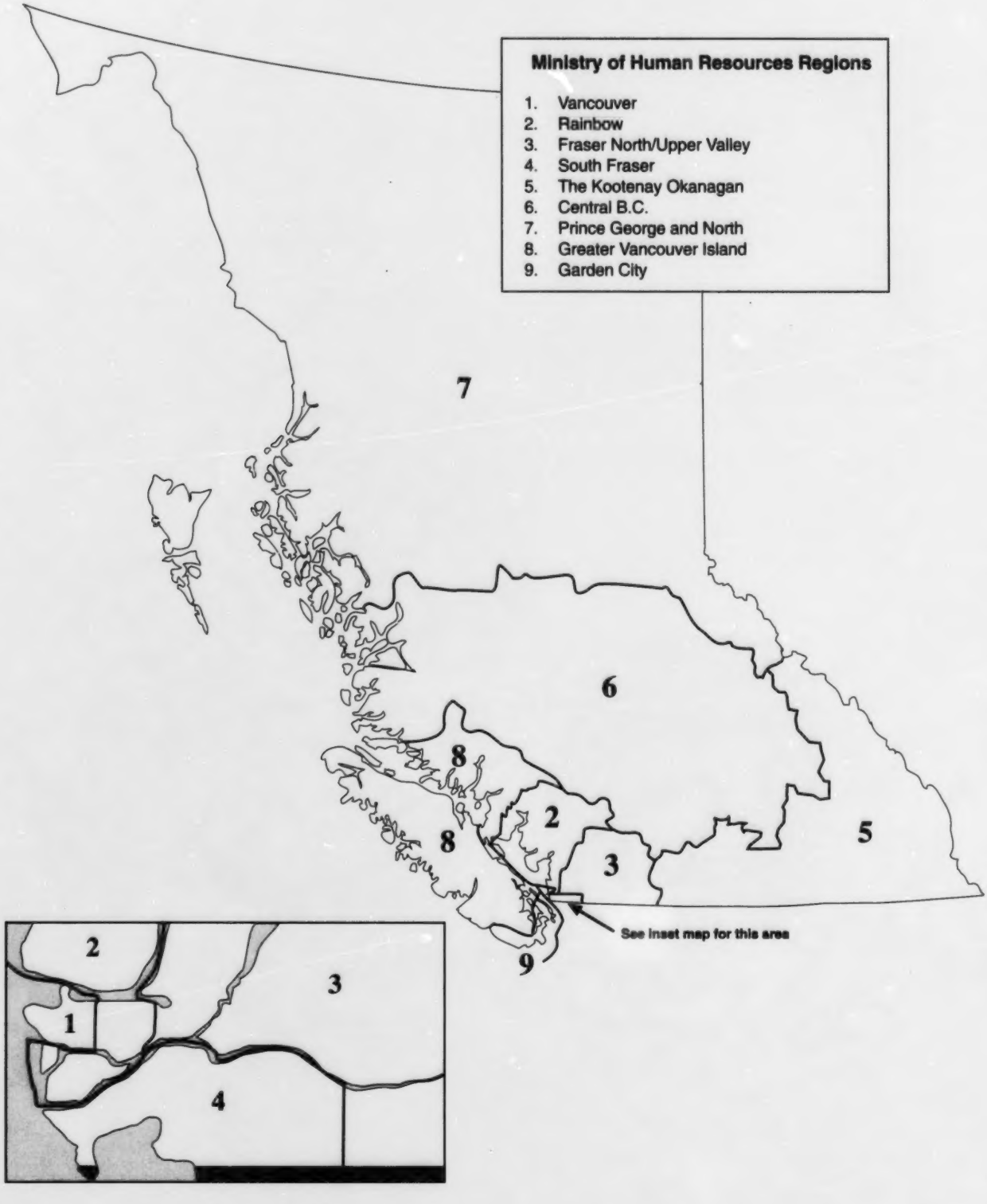


Total Expenditure: $1,565[1]

1. The total expenditure on the pie chart varies with the expenditure table by the net of tangible capital assets and amortization expense because the negative amount could not be charted.

Ministry Organization, March 31, 1999




Ministry of Human Resources Regions
1. Vancouver
2. Rainbow
3. Fraser North/Upper Valley
4. South Fraser
5. The Kootenay Okanagan
6. Central B.C.
7. Prince George and North
8. Greater Vancouver Island
9. Garden City
7
6
8
8
2
3
5
9
See inset map for this area
2
3
1
4

Ministry of Human Resources

Mission

The mission of the Ministry of Human Resources is to help people in British Columbia achieve economic security through attachment to the labour market and, when necessary, through income support and related services.

Vision

The ministry's vision for the future provides a long-term foundation for our values, our goals and our specific plans. Our vision is of a province where:

- people have good income from participation in the labour market;
- the ministry effectively helps people move from welfare to work;
- children are raised in families and supportive communities; and
- all people are able to contribute actively to their communities.

Values

The work of the ministry is carried out by employees who share basic values with the ministry. These values are evident in all our initiatives and in the way each of us carries out our day-to-day work. The ministry values:

- people in all their diversity;
- children, families and supportive communities;
- work over welfare;
- respect for the personal dignity of our clients;
- excellence in service;
- each other and the work we do;
- personal and corporate responsibility;
- fair decision-making;
- ideas and innovation;
- public confidence in our work; and
- partnerships with communities.

BC Benefits Programs

Eligibility for BC Benefits depends on individual or family income and assets. Applicants are expected to use all other sources of income and assets before qualifying and, with some exceptions, recipients of income assistance and youth allowances must either actively search for employment or participate in an approved employment-related program.

The ministry looks at several criteria—age, employability, disability, family size—to determine which of the ministry's assistance programs are most appropriate for the individual or family. Each program is designed to meet the needs of particular types of applicants or particular situations.

Income Support Programs

Income Assistance – provides support (see the rate table on page 9) to individuals and their dependants who are:

- aged 25 to 59 years
- aged 60 to 64 years
- aged 65 years or older
- aged less than 19 years and living away from home; and
- aged less than 19 years and living in the home of a relative.

Those aged 25 to 59 years must participate in programs designed to help them return to the labour market, except for people with special needs such as those in treatment programs or with medical conditions. Participation is also voluntary for single parents of children under seven years old or whose child has a mental or physical disability. There are no eligibility requirements regarding employment for those aged 60 years or older.

Income Support for Persons with Disabilities – is provided to those designated as persons with disabilities who are 18 years or older. Once designated, an individual retains the Disability Benefits designation. However, benefits (see the rate table on page 9) are based on the recipient's ongoing financial need.

Youth Works – living allowances are provided to those aged 19 to 24 years who participate in job search and job search training. The same exceptions apply to this age group as those aged 25 to 59 years.

Training programs which recipients are required to take – Youth Works for those aged 19 to 24 years and Welfare to Work programs for those aged 25 to 59 years – are provided without charge by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. Other income assistance recipients, except those 65 years or older, have the option to take Welfare to Work training.

Besides these programs which provide ongoing assistance as the need persists, other programs provide assistance in special situations of need.

Hardship Assistance – is provided to those who do not meet the criteria for regular income assistance but who are experiencing undue hardship, for example, awaiting Employment Insurance, Workers' Compensation, pension or other income, being unable meet citizenship requirements, or who are out of work because of a strike or lockout. In many cases, the support provided must be repaid.

Supplementary Allowances – are provided to income assistance recipients beyond the regular assistance rates to help with the costs of:

- burial and cremation
- bus passes
- camp fees
- Christmas
- clothing/comforts for those in special care facilities
- Co-operative Housing Association share purchase
- dealing with an unexpected crisis
- guide dog allowances
- losing a benefit cheque that was not yet endorsed
- a necessary move
- sending children back to school
- security deposits for rental accommodation
- entering the labour market (work clothes, transportation); and
- attending a child protection or family maintenance hearing.

Administered Benefits and Services – provide payments to community-based support services which complement ministry programs. They include:

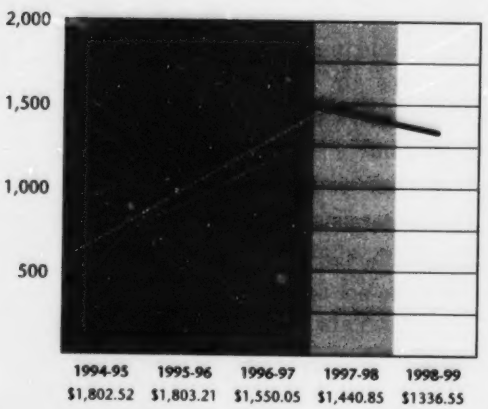
- user fees for residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs paid directly to facilities
- non-residential alcohol and drug counselling services for income assistance recipients
- helping income assistance recipients unable to enter employment to participate in a community volunteer program
- costs for obtaining family maintenance orders, including legal fees, paternity blood testing and necessary transportation
- short-term homemaker services in emergency situations
- hostel or emergency accommodation for persons without other resources
- the costs of obtaining identification documents
- translation services for applicants who do not speak English
- peer counselling for seniors
- assistance for expenses of Disability Benefits recipients related to a volunteer work experience program; and
- user fees for continuing care and mental health residential care programs.

BC Benefit Income Support Rates, Effective August 1997

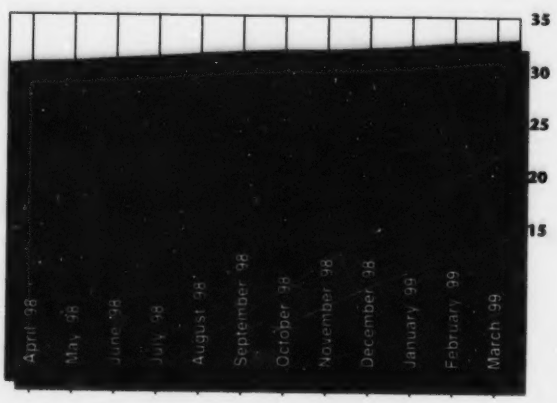
Family Size [3]	Employable/ Temporarily excused	Disability Benefits Level I [1] or Age 60-64	Single Parents (non Disability Benefits)	Disability Benefits Level II [2] or Seniors
Single	$500	$596	N/A	$771 [4]
Single (age 55-59)	$546	$596	N/A	$771
Two persons	$811	$953	$879	$1,128 [5]
Couple (age 55-59)	$903	$953	N/A	$1,128
Three persons	$993	$1,043	$969	$1,218
Four persons	$1,033	$1,083	$1,009	$1,258
Five persons	$1,083	$1,133	$1,059	$1,308
Six persons	$1,113	$1,163	$1,089	$1,338
Seven persons	$1,143	$1,193	$1,119	$1,368
Eight persons or more	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person

1. Disability Benefits Level I designation under the *BC Benefits Act* is given to applicants with disabilities that necessitate on-going costs or assistance for at least six months.
2. Disability Benefits Level II designation under the *Disability Benefits Program Act* is given to applicants with severe, permanent disabilities that require unusual and continuous monthly expenditures for unusual but essential continuous needs.
3. BC Family Bonus - These rates reflect a transfer of income support from BC Benefits to the BC Family Bonus which provides up to $103 per month per child based on income whether from work or from BC Benefits. Consequently, for families of three or more, these rates are $103 per child lower than the rates prior to August 1996.
4. Single parents designated Disability Benefits Level II receive an additional $175 per month.
5. Couples and two-parent families where two members are eligible for Disability Benefits Level II or Seniors Benefits receive an additional $175 per month.

Income Support Expenditures
1994-95 to 1998-99 (millions)

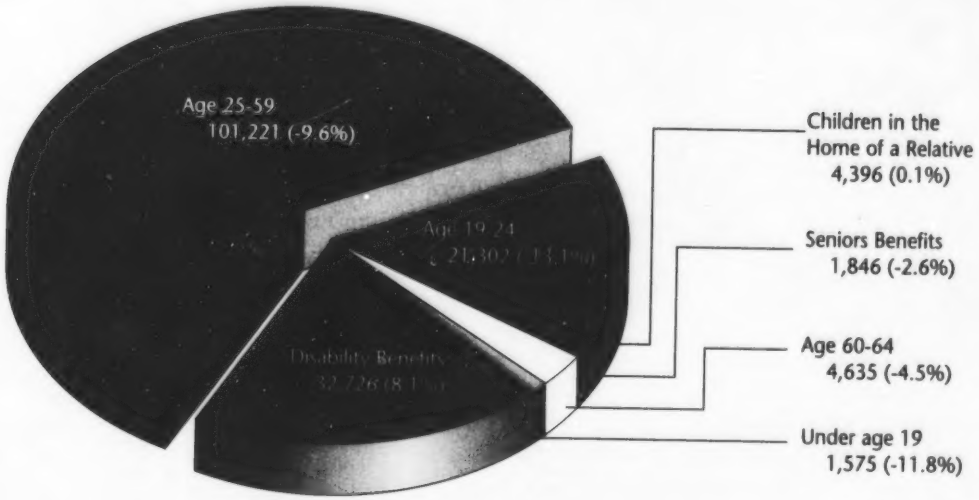


Disability Benefits Caseload (000s)
April 1998 to March 1999

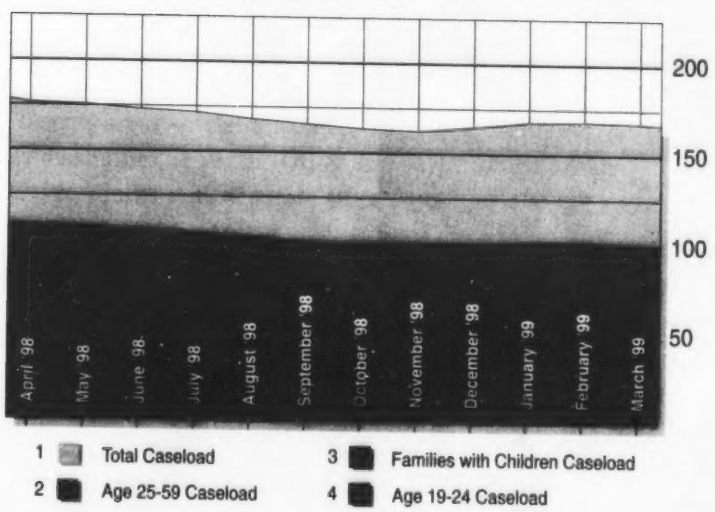


Income Support Caseload
March 1999
Number of cases (Percent change over March 1998)

Total = 167,701 (-6.7%)



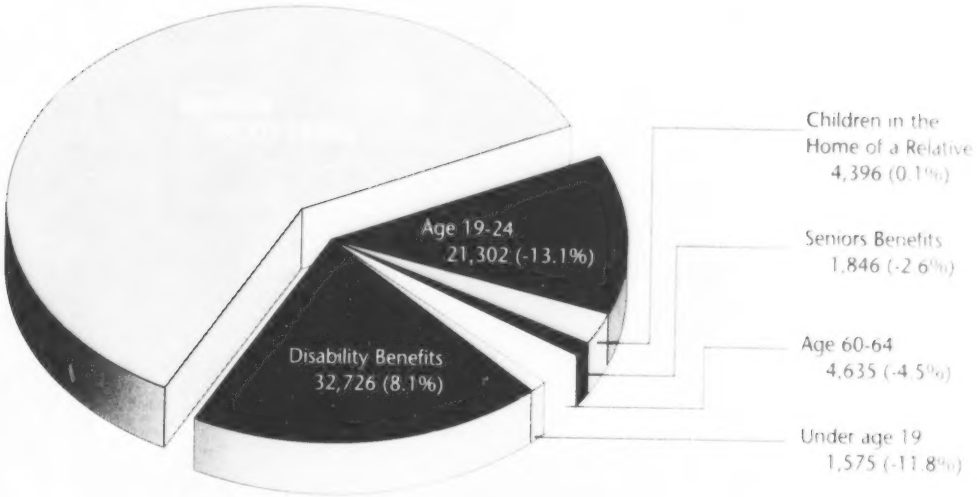
Income Support Caseload (000s)
April 1998 to March 1999



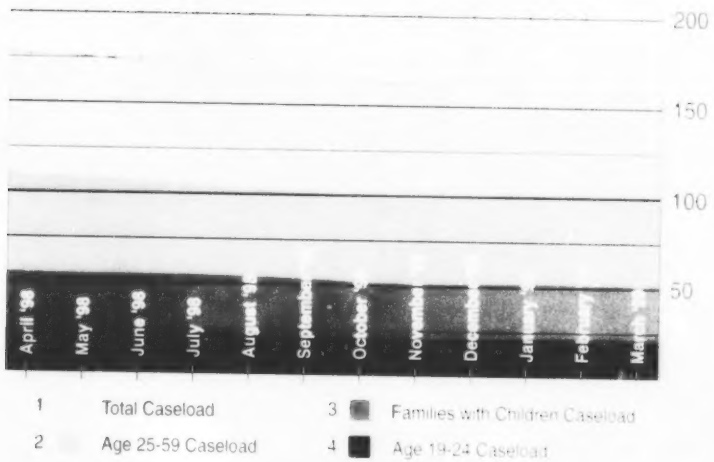
Note: The graph above details total caseload (1) and selected parts of the caseload (2,3, and 4). It does not detail all parts of the caseload and there is overlap between the two age categories and the caseload of families with children.

Income Support Caseload
March 1999
Number of cases (Percent change over March 1998)

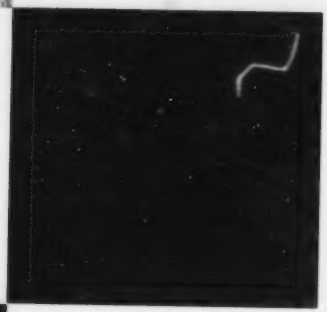
Total = 167,701 (-6.7%)


Children in the Home of a Relative 4,396 (0.1%)
Seniors Benefits 1,846 (-2.6%)
Age 60-64 4,635 (-4.5%)
Under age 19 1,575 (-11.8%)
Age 19-24 21,302 (-13.1%)
Disability Benefits 32,726 (8.1%)

Income Support Caseload (000s)
April 1998 to March 1999



Note: The graph above details total caseload (1) and selected parts of the caseload (2,3, and 4). It does not detail all parts of the caseload and there is overlap between the two age categories and the caseload of families with children.



Field Services and Program Operations

Field Services

Field Services delivers income support programs and services through 138 district offices and a number of visiting offices in nine regions throughout the province. Income support programs are delivered under the authority of the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act, the BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act,* the *BC Benefits (Child Care) Act, the BC Benefits (Appeals) Act, the Disability Benefits Program Act, the Financial Administration Act,* and the corresponding regulations for each.

Each of the nine regions is managed by a Regional Executive Officer (REO) who is responsible for the overall accountability and successful delivery of the BC Benefits program in the region. The REO provides leadership and direction in the management of staff, contracted services, financial and physical resources, and in the resolution of operational priorities and issues. The REO reports directly to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Field Services and Program Operations Division.

Service delivery models vary within regions, depending on the needs of the client population and geographical considerations. Ministry staff continually look for more efficient ways of providing service. Although some areas remained generalized, in 1998 the shift towards specialization continued. For example, in some areas specialized offices were created to serve single parents, people with disabilities, or youth. Other areas created offices that specialize in intake procedures, with separate offices providing ongoing services and benefits to eligible recipients.

In keeping with the ministry's strategic priority of providing resources to those who are truly in need, a variety of initiatives were implemented. For example, in August 1998, the BC Benefits (Income Assistance, Youth Works, and Disability Benefits Program) Regulations were amended to introduce applicant orientation sessions. The introduction of the applicant orientation sessions provided potential applicants with information about BC Benefits programs and job search resources in an effort to increase awareness of alternatives to income assistance. Another such initiative was the reintroduction of eligibility audits in January 1999. These audits serve as a periodic review of each recipient's ongoing eligibility.

Program Operations

Program Operations supports the work of Field Services through the Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement Branch (PCE), the Health Services Branch (HSB), the Labour Market Attachment Branch (LMAB) and the Emergency Social Services Branch (ESS). Each branch has its own distinct mandate and reports to the Executive Director of the Program Operations Division.

PCE works in partnership with other ministry staff in pursuing a balance between prevention and enforcement to ensure compliance with the BC Benefits legislation. Each region provides a full range of fraud and error prevention, compliance, and enforcement activities.

HSB provides eligible clients with Ministry of Health medical coverage, optical and dental services, and essential medical equipment and supplies. The branch has responsibility for reviewing applications and approving benefits for both permanent and temporary disability designations.

LMAB provides information and advice to the ministry's executive on matters pertaining to the implementation of the Labour Market Development Agreement, and is responsible for the development of new programming to support ministry clients returning the labour market.

ESS is part of the Provincial Emergency Program and co-ordinates the work of over 5,500 volunteers in 120 communities across British Columbia. In the event of a disaster, ESS provides emergency goods and services for those people affected. It is also responsible for developing plans to ensure continuity of ministry operations throughout and following a disaster.

Labour Market Attachment Branch

The Labour Market Attachment Branch is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) by the Ministry of Human Resources with the goal of maximizing client participation and ministry cost savings.

The branch is also responsible for the development and implementation of new initiatives identified by the Field Services Division.

The branch also provides support to other ministries and organizations in development and implementation of initiatives related to labour market attachment for BC Benefits clients.

Objective: ***To support the ministry executive and field services with the implementation of the LMDA.***

Strategy: The branch was an active participant in the implementation of the LMDA during 1998-99. The branch provided information and advice to the ministry executive on matters pertaining to the LMDA and ensured issues raised by the field were dealt with in an efficient manner.

Results: Field staff reviewed 57,000 client files and referred approximately of 21,000 mutual clients to Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) programs and services.

Objective: ***To ensure the need of ministry clients are reflected during the implementation of the LMDA.***

Strategy: The branch is the ministry's official liaison to the LMDA Secretariat. The LMDA Secretariat ensures Management Committee directions are implemented, oversees the activities of working groups, undertakes issues management and coordinates Management Committee meetings. Branch staff also represent the ministry on all LMDA working groups and a number of individual working committees.

Results: The needs of the ministry clients are always at the forefront during the decision-making process.

Objective: ***To monitor and track the impact of the LMDA on the BC Benefits caseload.***

Strategy: The branch has worked with other branches, including Economic Analysis and Information Technology, within the ministry and with HRDC to develop

reporting and tracking mechanisms to monitor the results of all activities related to LMDA.

Results: The branch is now developing a ministry wide electronic tracking system known as Merlin, which will enable ministry staff to track clients progress through LMDA programs in order to assist clients in achieving full-time attachment to a job. Merlin will allow Regional headquarters, LMAB and Economic Analysis Branch to extract reports on an as-needed basis, thereby assisting in planning and assessing performance measurements.

The ministry is able to track the activity and financial savings resulting from LMDA activities. The provision of LMDA programs and services resulted in $10M in savings to the provincial income assistance account in 1998-99.

Objective: ***To assist in the development and implementation of projects related to labour market attachment for BC Benefits clients.***

Strategy: The branch develops new labour market attachment programs for BC Benefits clients, implements measures to maximize the referral of clients to employment programs managed by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and modifies current programs to better address client needs.

Results: The branch was involved in the development of the Annual Eligibility Review Project, the Dormant File Review Project and Disability Benefits II Supports to Employment. All of these programs have resulted in better labour market attachment with savings in income assistance.

The goals of AER are to ensure that all clients are involved in active job searches and are receiving services that will assist them in their return to work. The Dormant File Review Project targets clients files that have had no activity for a period of time, to assist clients to attach to the labour market or to explore alternative means of economic independence. The purpose of Supports to Employment is to assist Disability Benefits II clients to achieve their employment potential.

Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement

The Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement (PCE) Branch is dedicated to working in partnership with other ministry staff in pursuing a balance between prevention and enforcement to ensure a high level of compliance with the *BC Benefits Act* and the *Disability Benefits Program Act* and regulations.

The PCE branch was established in 1994 to combat fraud and abuse, and to increase public confidence in the BC Benefits support programs. The branch has three distinct components:

1. Prevention Program
2. Compliance Program
3. Enforcement Program

Prevention

Objective: ***To prevent and deter fraud and abuse in a proactive manner by introducing activities and controls designed to ensure that an individual or group is unable to follow through on any intention to commit fraud because of the checks and balances built into the eligibility determination process.***

The Prevention Program recommends ways to prevent the overpayment of scarce ministry resources to persons who are not eligible or who have not accessed all other sources of income.

The program consists of three elements:

- The Early Detection and Prevention (EDP) Program
- Information sharing (Data Matching); and
- Prevention of unwarranted expenditures related to federal programs.

Strategy: The EDP program is committed to the detection and prevention of fraud by conducting pre-eligibility reviews for selected categories of high-risk clients during the application process. The verification process ensures that assistance is only paid to eligible applicants. The EDP program was introduced in 1995 and has since expanded to include 85 verification officers working in employment and benefit centres under the direction of nine regional executive officers.

Results: Verification officers reviewed 40,516 files during 1998-99, resulting in savings estimated at $27.4 million.

Strategy: Data matching is the process of comparing the names of recipients receiving ministry assistance against client names held by federal or provincial governments, ministries or agencies. The objective of data matching is to identify all persons who:

- are claiming duplicate benefits for which they are not entitled;
- are not declaring other sources of income; or
- are eligible for benefits from other federal or provincial benefit programs.

Regular monthly data matches are conducted with Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba social service agencies. Continued matches have a deterrent and preventive effect.

Data match agreements with the BC Student Assistance Program and with the federal Canada Pension Plan have been developed. Those collecting dual payments will be identified to prevent long-term fraud. Both of these information-sharing agreements will be implemented in 1999-2000.

Results: Cost avoidance through data matching has been estimated at $245,000 annually.

Prevention program savings

EDP	$27,363,555
Data Matching	$245,000
Warrant disentitlement	$1,482,000
Fraud Disqualification	$1,018,500
Total	**$30,109,055**

Compliance

Objective: ***To maintain public confidence in the BC Benefits program by ensuring that scarce ministry resources are directed to individuals and families who are truly in need.***

The Compliance Program has two major components:

1. ***Eligibility Officers:*** 27 eligibility officers (EO) located in nine regional PCE offices review specific aspects of the BC Benefits support programs that are susceptible to fraud and error.

Strategy: ***Provincial Projects:*** The EOs completed a major project, begun in 1995, to ensure that all participants who qualified were receiving Canada Pension Plan benefits. In the final phase during 1998-99, officers reviewed 3,628 cases of persons with disabilities, with known CPP contributions who were not receiving CPP income. They assisted these persons to make application for federal benefits.

Results: The ministry adjusted the level of BC Benefits for individuals who qualified for federal CPP benefits, resulting in savings for the ministry of $9.37 million.

Strategy: ***Regional Projects:*** All regions conducted various residence confirmations, business licence checks and seasonal employment verifications to ensure that individuals continued to be eligible for BC Benefits and that benefit amounts paid reflected full entitlement.

Results: In total, 7,759 cases were reviewed; benefits were reduced or files closed in 1,506, or 19 per cent, of these cases. Savings for the ministry are projected at $4.5 million.

2. ***Summer Compliance Program:*** This program has evolved from a summer project implemented three years ago to a separate program area. The program operates continuously in the four Lower Mainland regions and on a rotational basis in three of the other five regions of the province. A program co-ordinator maintains responsibility for 19.38 FTEs. Staffing includes five compliance supervisors, 28 university and college co-op students (program officers), five assistant ministry investigators and five administrative staff.

Strategy: Residency and identification checks were conducted by the program officers on 14,926 individuals over a four month period in seven regions. Verification of the previous year's income tax information helped maximize the effectiveness of this compliance program.

Results: The program resulted in 1,835 case closures or ongoing reductions in benefits. A further 1,342 files were referred to enforcement staff for further investigation. Savings to the ministry are projected at $6.25 million for fiscal 1998-99.

Compliance program savings

CPP - Phase 4	$9,370,000
Summer Compliance Program	$4,800,000
Other Initiatives	$6,250,000
Total	**$20,420,000**

Enforcement

Objective: ***To reduce the incidence of fraud over time by proactively investigating and prosecuting offenders.***

Strategy: The enforcement component of the PCE Branch consists of 41 ministry investigators (MI) and 40 assistant ministry investigators (AMI). Investigations are prioritized by the type of offence and the dollar amount of the fraud.

Results: The ministry recovered $20,836,257 during 1998-99 as a result of enforcement investigations: 11,449 cases of suspected fraud were opened during the year; 5,744 repayment agreements were obtained, 155 criminal charges were laid, 197 criminal court cases were completed, as were 20 civil court cases.

Enforcement program savings

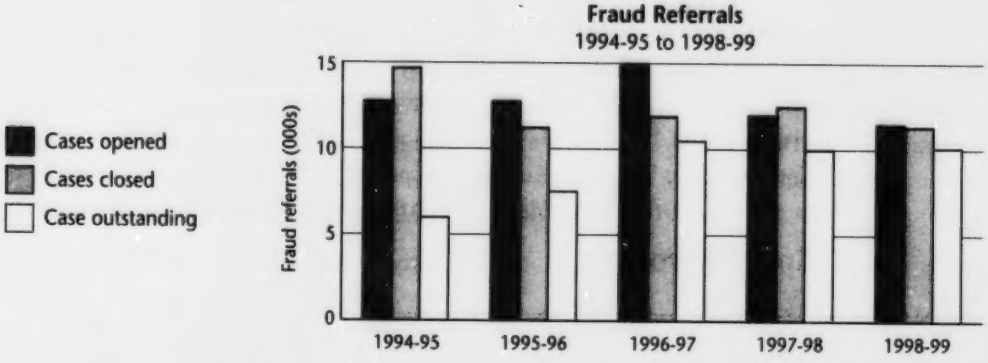
Benefits stopped	$1,886,080
Repayment agreements	$16,606,675
Compensation ordered	$2,343,502
Total	**$20,836,257**

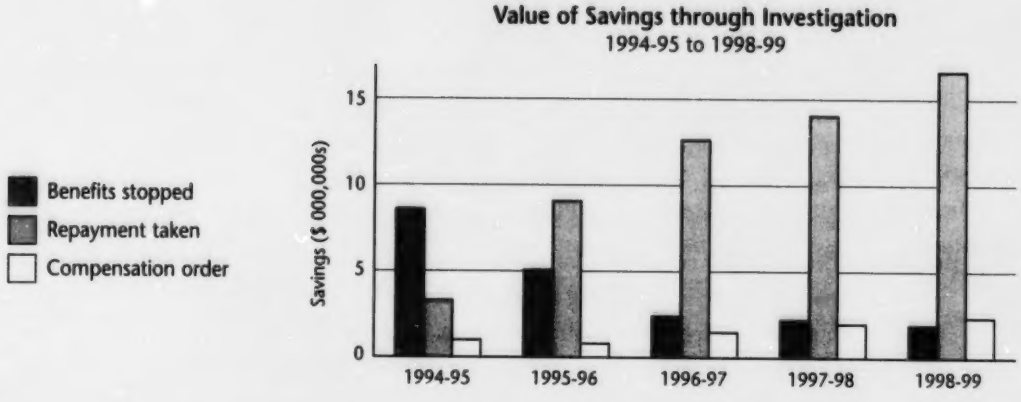
Total PCE savings, 1998-99

Prevention	$30,109,055
Compliance	$20,420,000
Enforcement	$20,836,257
Total	**$71,365,312**

Fraud referrals by type, 1999

Duplicate assistance		172
False identification		109
False address		667
	Total	**948**
Undeclared income		7,104
Undeclared assets		295
	Total	**7,399**
Dependent status		545
Common-law		767
Lost/stolen cheques		934
Miscellaneous		846
Assisted–Out of province		10
	Total	**3,102**





Emergency Social Services

Emergency Social Services (ESS) provides shelter, food, clothing, registration and inquiry, and personal services to those forced from their homes by natural or human caused emergencies such as fires, earthquakes or floods. More than 5,500 ESS volunteers provide these services in more than 120 communities across British Columbia. The branch supports the volunteers both directly and indirectly through public and private sector partnerships.

ESS responders were very active in 1998-99. A total of 11,366 people were assisted by ESS in 231 separate events.

The largest evacuation in the history of B.C. was the summer forest fire response of 1998 in Salmon Arm, and other communities including Kamloops, Kelowna, and Boston Bar. The provincial ESS response plan was activated for all of August as local ESS teams, provincial support team agencies' staff, volunteers and ministry staff assisted 8,540 people evacuated in numerous communities around the province as a result of forest fires. For the first time, an ESS Staffing Bureau was activated in Kamloops.

A gas plant explosion in the community of Taylor resulted in an emergency evacuation of 1,200 people to an ESS reception centre established in Fort St. John. In smaller incidents, mostly involving localized flooding or house or apartment fires, an additional 1,716 people were provided ESS services.

Specific Projects

Thunderbird IV

Objective: ***To monitor the effectiveness of ministry plans for responding to a major earthquake affecting ministry operations on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.***

Strategy: In January 1999, the province participated jointly with the federal government in the Thunderbird IV exercise to test response to a simulated catastrophic earthquake off the west coast of Vancouver Island. The ESS Branch took the lead role in developing the ministry's part of the exercise and training staff in their response roles. A ministry Emergency Operations Centre was established in Victoria to simulate response actions. Ministry staff were also involved in simulations at the Provincial Emergency Co-ordination Centre and at regional response units in Victoria and on the Lower Mainland.

Results: The ministry response plan worked very well and important lessons were learned. Ongoing training and annual exercises were identified as necessary to ensure an effective ministry response. The need for effective communications and efficient administrative systems in the emergency operation centre was identified. A further lesson learned was the need to identify and train more

regional staff in their roles at Provincial Response Emergency Operation Centres (PREOC).

Mobile Support Teams

Objective: ***To ensure an effective emergency response in communities where ESS is minimal or non-existent or when the scale of a disaster overwhelms local responders.***

Strategy: Mobile Support Teams (MST) have been created in several regions of the province, composed of highly trained ESS volunteers with a mission to respond quickly to any area of the province where local volunteers are overwhelmed by a disaster. Within 24 hours the branch can dispatch a self-contained fully equipped team to any community in the province requiring support. In addition to existing teams on Vancouver Island, northern British Columbia, and Southeast, a new MST was trained in the southwest area of the province. A new team will be formed in the central region in November 1999.

Results: Members of four teams were successfully dispatched in support of numerous emergency responses during the summer fire season. MST members managed reception centres, trained local walk-in volunteers and relieved exhausted community ESS responders. In the month of August alone, approximately 1,000 new ESS volunteers received on-site training and orientations from trainers brought in as part of Mobile Support Teams.

ESS Staffing Bureau

Objective: ***To ensure that ESS response workers and ministry staff deployed from outside a region to assist in an emergency response have their needs met for accommodation, registration, transportation and personal support on arrival at an affected community.***

Strategy: The ESS Program developed the ESS Staffing Bureau to deal with the logistical and personal needs of emergency responders. An ESS Staffing Bureau was activated and deployed for the first time ever in Kamloops in August 1998 in support of forest fire emergency responses.

Results: More than 100 ESS volunteers and 26 ministry staff assisted at the Kamloops staffing bureau prior to being dispatched to affected communities in south central British Columbia. All were provided with a debriefing upon the close of operations and with travel assistance home when necessary. Comments by those using the ESS Staffing Bureau were very positive. Subsequent debriefings have led to streamlining of bureau operations. A need for improved activation procedures and recruitment of a second ESS staffing bureau team was identified.

ESS Training

Objective: ***To ensure that ESS volunteers and ministry staff are trained and ready to respond to disasters in their communities.***

Strategy: The ESS Branch works in partnership with the Justice Institute to co-ordinate cost-effective training for ESS volunteers and ministry staff in all regions of the province. Training is provided by two full-time contracted Justice Institute instructors and by 22 ESS volunteer instructors who provide training in their local communities. Most training is brought directly to communities to minimize travel costs and ensure that all regions of the province have access to training.

Results: A total of 2,061 volunteers and staff received scheduled training in 111 courses totalling 902 hours of training time. Approximately 750 more volunteers and staff received orientations and hands-on training in ESS during emergency response operations. Evaluations from participants consistently rate the quality of training as very high.

Health Services

Health Services Branch provides eligible recipients and their families with optical and dental services, essential medical equipment and supplies, and other medically necessary services. Recipients are also provided access to the Ministry of Health's Medical Services Plan and Pharmacare programs.

The branch reviews and approves benefits for the permanent disability designation under the *Disability Benefits Program Act* (Disability Benefits Level 2) and for a temporary designation under the *BC Benefits* (Income Assistance) *Act* (Disability Benefits Level 1), also *BC Benefits* (Youth Works) *Act*.

Objective: ***To support the ministry goal of enhancing opportunities for persons with disabilities to enter the labour market***

Strategy: The Health Services Branch has been working in partnership with other branches and outside stakeholders to ensure that health services programs and benefits assist persons with disabilities in entering the labour market.

Results: The ministry began a process of identifying gaps and weaknesses within existing health services policy and legislation which create barriers to persons with disabilities in entering the workforce. This includes health benefits continuation and the development of a rapid re-instatement process for persons with Disability Benefits Level 2 designation to quickly re-establish their eligibility for benefits should labour market attachment not be successful.

Objective: ***To enhance communications both within the branch and with outside stakeholders.***

Strategy: Communications protocols and standards have been developed for use within the branch and response standards developed for communications outside the branch.

Results: Communications were improved within the branch on corporate and day-to-day administrative issues as well as improved communication with field staff and advocacy groups.

Objective: ***To improve client service by identifying and improving inefficiencies in administration, service delivery, facilities and computer systems.***

Strategy: Health Services Branch has continued to refine systems and administrative issues and introduced a review process to identify administrative inefficiencies.

Results: Refined service delivery processes and procedures were developed in early 1999 and implemented in the fall of 1999. HSB had been organized into areas of program expertise, using various administrative and financial procedures within each area. Work units were changed to combine programs and to have staff cross-trained in all areas. Administrative processess were streamlined and financial tasks consolidated implementing standards and controls. With resources redirected, backlogs were eliminated and client service improved.

Objective: ***To elevate the profile and enhance the understanding of the role of Health Services Branch with regional field managers and field staff.***

Strategy: Health Services Branch has been actively participating in informing field managers of branch issues and presenting an overview of branch operations through attendance at regional managers' meetings. As well, field managers and staff have been encouraged to visit Health Services Branch.

Results: Relations with field staff have improved, including an increased understanding of health services issues, a better working relationship with our partners in the field, and a heightened awareness by field staff of the pressures at the branch (for example, volume, media issues, executive issues, etc.) that affect the delivery of service.

Objective: ***To improve access to dental benefits to clients in communities with limited dental services.***

Strategy: The BC Healthy Kids dental van, a travelling mobile dental clinic to serve northern communities, was introduced and operated from April to October 1998.

Results: Over six months, the BC Healthy Kids dental van served 521 persons, including 373 children. Most of them were five years and older and 26 per cent had never been to a dentist.

Policy and Research

Economic Analysis

The Economic Analysis Branch was established in August 1998, evolving from the previous Performance Measurement and Management Information Branch. The new branch is responsible for:

- providing statistical information on caseloads, managing the integrity and security of the databases and ensuring all statistical information is consistent
- forecasting caseloads and expenditures
- measuring and reporting on the costs and benefits of existing or new ministry programs and initiatives from the perspective of the ministry, the provincial government, clients and other stakeholders
- assessing the costs and benefits of all proposed programs and initiatives for clients, the ministry and its finances, and on other ministries
- working with research and academic organizations to implement research strategies that support ministry objectives
- participating on federal/provincial/territorial committees dealing with social development issues; and
- providing library services to the ministry.

Some examples of the branch work during 1998-99 follow:

The branch conducted research to assess the impact of high school graduation on an individual's likelihood of needing income assistance in the future, by matching high school graduation records with income assistance records. The results, presented at a Canadian Economics Association conference, identified and quantified the reduction in income assistance dependence that would result from a program aimed at increasing the rate of high school graduation.

The branch revamped forecasting methods during 1998-99, to base forecasts on more than 200 forecasting models rather than the previous single model. This has increased the accuracy of forecasting for the ministry.

Inter-Agency Relations

The Inter-Agency Relations Branch is responsible for co-ordination of the ministry's working relationships with other ministries, governments, the community and advocacy groups. The branch is also responsible for the development, interpretation and application of all ministry legislation, the ministry's appeal systems, co-ordination of services with legal counsel, and development and implementation of innovative pilot projects.

The branch was created in August 1998 as part of a redesign of policy and research functions. The branch works closely with other branches within Policy and Research Division and with other divisions to ensure the work of the branch reflects the ministry's strategic objectives.

The branch consists of three multi-disciplinary teams focused on legislative services, intra-provincial relations and inter-jurisdictional relations.

Legislative Services Team is responsible for the development and maintenance of all ministry legislation and regulations, the multi-level community-based BC Benefits Appeal system, and co-ordination of legal advice and opinions through legal counsel with the Ministry of Attorney General.

Intra-provincial Team is responsible for liaison and co-ordination of initiatives with other provincial ministries, agencies and stakeholder groups. During 1998-99, responsibility for co-operatives was transferred to the ministry from the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture. The Intra-provincial Team led the development of a new *Cooperative Association Act* and, more generally, the development of co-operative initiatives. The *Cooperative Act* in force at the time had not been updated for several decades and did not reflect the current international conventions on co-operatives. The team organized a consultation process which involved the general public, business and the co-operative sector, and formulated the legislative amendments during 1998-99. The *Cooperative Association Act* was introduced and passed in the provincial legislature after the end of the fiscal year.

Inter-jurisdictional Team is responsible for liaison and co-ordination of programs and policies with other provinces and federal jurisdictions. During 1998-99, the team provided input and support on social services issues to the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in the negotiation of treaties with First Nations peoples. The team also worked with federal immigration authorities to address the issue of sponsors who default on their obligation to support immigrants when the immigrants are unable to support themselves.

Social Policy

The Social Policy Branch was established in July 1998 as part of a strategic redesign of the Policy and Research Division. The redesign responds to changing demands upon the ministry due to shifts in the economy, the labour market and caseload demographics. The Social Policy Branch new structure is integral to the ministry's ability to successfully respond to these challenges through a co-ordinated and innovative approach to social policy development.

The branch works co-operatively with other branches in the Policy and Research Division in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of all social policy that forms the framework for BC Benefits legislation, regulations and programs. These services are provided through three multidisciplinary teams:

Labour Market Team is responsible for the development of policy that supports the ministry in its mandate to help people in British Columbia achieve economic security through attachment to the labour market. The team goal is to ensure that the ministry's policies and programs enhance participants' opportunities for economic independence through attachment to the labour market or other community involvement and through the provision of transitional supports. The team focus includes such issues as earnings exemptions, transition-to-work benefits, eligibility criteria, income assistance rate structures, treatment of income and assets, and strategies to reduce poverty.

Health and Families Team develops policy that supports the ministry mandate to support children, families and others while in need. The team goal is to ensure that the ministry policies and programs provide the supports and services necessary for the health and well-being of children and families, including persons with disabilities who may require additional or alternate supports and services. The team focus includes such issues as disability allowance, medical exemptions (from the requirement to seek work), schedule of health benefits, family maintenance, integration of benefits with BC Family Bonus, as well as housing and transportation issues.

Implementation and Procedures Team works closely with other branches of the ministry to ensure the effective implementation of new or amended policies. Effective implementation includes the co-ordination and development of regulation changes, policy manual amendments, information systems, training for field and operational staff, providing communications material for staff and the public, and evaluating the effectiveness of new policies and pilot projects.

Key Initiatives

In support of government priorities and the ministry's goals and objectives, the Social Policy Branch developed, amended and implemented a variety of policies during 1998/99. Highlights include:

- **Application Orientation Sessions:** The ministry introduced these sessions as part of the benefits application process. Sessions are designed to facilitate and streamline the application process by providing applicants information as to the eligibility requirements, essential documents required and expectations to seek work or pursue other income. Applicants who are job-ready are referred to employment services. If an applicant's circumstances pose an immediate risk to their health or safety or of any dependents, the applicant is not required to attend a session. With this initiative, the province achieved savings of $27.07 million through diversion from the caseload in the 1998/99 fiscal year.
- **BC Earned Income Benefit:** British Columbia was the first in Canada to introduce the Family Bonus for all low-income families. When the federal government subsequently introduced the National Child Benefit in 1998, the province reinvested the savings from the Family Bonus into the new Earned Income Benefit, which replaced the Working Income Supplement discontinued by the federal government. The branch worked closely with the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations to introduce the BC Earned Income Benefit which provides a supplement to the Family Bonus, based on employment and self-employment earnings, of up to $605 per child in a year. This assists working low-income families to care for their children and promotes labour market attachment.
- **Convention Refugees:** Regular Income Assistance and benefits were extended to applicants who are recognized as Convention refugees by the Immigration and Refugee Appeal Board pursuant to the United Nations Convention on Refugees. Previously, regular assistance was provided only after refugees gained landed immigrant status, a process which can take several years and during which only hardship assistance is available. By providing regular assistance as soon as refugees apply for landed status, convention refugees and their families can have access to training programs, school start-up allowances and other supports that lead to earlier independence.
- **Residency Eligibility /Excluded Family Member:** Income assistance can now be provided to families where one adult member does not meet the residency status requirements. Previously the entire family was ineligible for any form of income assistance if one adult had no status in Canada. Current policy allows for assistance for the rest of the family.

- **Co-op Housing Share Purchase Benefit:** Recipients of these repayable benefits were given the option of delaying their repayment or repaying immediately. Previous policy was inequitable because it required immediate recovery from the participants' monthly benefits whereas tenants in rental housing could repay their security deposits when they moved. This policy change enables more participants to consider co-op housing as a stable housing option.
- **Eligibility for Persons Affected by Strike or Lockout:** Persons who are not on strike or lockout, but are nonetheless unable to go to work due to a strike or lockout, may now be eligible for income assistance.
- **Changes to ID Requirements:** The official ID card issued by Corrections Canada has been accepted as a primary form of ID for applicants released from correction facilities. This expedites the application process for ex-offenders enhancing their chances for successful transition. A Native Status Card has also been added to the list of secondary ID acceptable for eligibility purposes. This change expedites applications for First Nation applicants who often have fewer forms of identification.
- **Warrant Transportation:** Individuals who have an outstanding warrant in another province can receive assistance with transportation costs to return to the jurisdiction if they wish to plead not guilty to the charge. Because individuals with outstanding warrants are not eligible for IA, this one-time only transportation benefit ensures that no one is compelled to plead guilty to a charge by their need for income assistance. (Persons who plead guilty to an offence for which an outstanding warrant is issued can have the charge transferred to B.C. and the warrant is then expunged.)

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Division has five component branches:

- Intergovernmental Relations Branch
- Information and Privacy
- Strategic/Business Planning
- Correspondence; and
- Client Call.

Overall, the division supports the deputy minister and executive committee by managing key ministry issues, including:

- assuming a leadership role in the development of policy and issues management on federal/provincial/territorial initiatives
- ensuring the ministry is in full compliance with legislated standards for the protection of individual privacy as well as for the release of information provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*
- developing the overall strategic and business plan for the ministry
- preparing and acting as a final quality control point for all cabinet submissions, ministerial and deputy ministerial briefing materials and correspondence
- promptly handling concerns and highly sensitive issues referred from the minister's office, deputy minister's office, constituency offices, other minister's offices, the ombudsman, advocacy groups, clients and members of the public
- tracking and managing issues; and
- managing special projects and conducting research as directed by the deputy minister.

Intergovernmental Relations

The Intergovernmental Relations branch provides a leadership role in the development of policy and issues management on federal/provincial/territorial initiatives. This includes issues pertaining to activities led by the ministry as well as issues led by other ministries or provincial agencies which may affect the ministry. This involves providing support to both the minister and deputy minister in their meetings with federal/provincial/territorial counterparts. The ministry is represented on the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee of Ministers Responsible for Social Services and on various supporting working groups which are, from time to time, chaired by the minister.

The Intergovernmental Relations branch also plays a leadership role in the intergovernmental realm and is proactive in developing concepts and programs that enhance and strengthen the province's intergovernmental agenda.

Objective: ***To work with other jurisdictions to implement the National Child Benefit.***

Strategy: Branch staff worked on behalf of the province to co-ordinate successful implementation of the second installment of the National Child Benefit (scheduled for July 1, 1999) through negotiations with the federal government and other provinces and territories. The goals of the benefit are to reduce the depth of child poverty and promote attachment to the labour market.

Results: British Columbia's experience in introducing the BC Family Bonus was instrumental in guiding the successful implementation process for the first and second installments of the National Child Benefit. The province allocated its reinvestment funds to a variety of programs designed to reduce the depth of child poverty and promote attachment to the labour market.

Objective: ***To work with federal, provincial and territorial partners toward creation of a vision for developing and implementing policies affecting persons with disabilities.***

Strategy: As a member of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Benefits and Services for Persons with Disabilities, branch staff assisted in the development of a vision paper ***In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*** which was released in late 1998.

Results: ***In Unison*** has been distributed to all provincial government ministries and is being used to guide development and implementation of polices related to persons with disabilities.

Information and Privacy

The Information and Privacy Branch administers the ministry's responsibilities under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.* Branch activity is aimed at ensuring the ministry is in full compliance with the legislated standards for the protection of privacy of personal information in its custody, and with the provisions for access to records held by the ministry, including an individual's personal information. While about 60 per cent of branch activity is related to the management of formal requests for access to information, significant effort is devoted to policy and program development.

Objective: ***To bring the ministry into compliance with legislated time frames for response to information requests.***

Strategy: The branch continued to implement measures designed to increase efficiency and reduce the response time to requests for information. During 1998-99, the branch dealt with 740 new requests for information, an increase of more than 20 per

cent: 95 per cent of all access requests are for personal information. The ministry receives one of the highest volumes of access requests of all ministries across government.

Results: As a result of the continued high volume of requests for information, the ministry was unable to meet the legislated time frames for response in all cases.

Objective: ***To ensure that the protection of privacy and information access policies and requirements under the Act are fully integrated into all aspects of ministry operations.***

Strategy: The branch continued to be involved in the revision of the BC Benefits policy manual and other regulatory and policy initiatives of the ministry. Branch staff consulted throughout the year with field staff on privacy matters, provided input into program development and training for ministry personnel. Branch staff also worked on the development and implementation of various information-sharing agreements. The branch participated in the investigation and resolution of privacy complaints and represented the ministry in reviews and other matters involving the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Results: Ministry programs and operations continued to be developed within the context of the province's privacy and information access legislation.

Strategic/Business Planning

The Strategic/Business Planning Branch develops the overall strategic and business plan for the ministry. In addition, the branch is responsible for preparing all support materials for the budget estimates process and for co-ordinating input from every component of the ministry. Special projects of a sensitive nature in any area of the ministry are also assigned to the branch.

Correspondence

The Correspondence Branch is responsible for the tracking and management of incoming letters to the minister's office, and ensures that written public inquiries receive responses in a timely and confidential manner. The Correspondence Branch develops correspondence business practices and management standards, in consultation with the minister's office, to direct and guide a ministerial correspondence program. Inquiries range from client specific issues to general information on program policies. The Correspondence Branch managed about 1,600 pieces of correspondence in 1998-99.

Client Call

The Client Call Branch responds to public inquiries and client specific concerns about ministry programs, providing general information and referrals to appropriate resources. A high volume of diverse calls are referred to this unit from the minister's office, ***Enquiry BC***, the Premier's Office, other ministries and agencies. The majority of calls deal with issues of extreme sensitivity and responses must be timely and confidential.

The number of calls in 1998-99 totalled 3,355, averaging 280 calls per month. The number of calls reflects the changes in policy, seasonal issues, changes in service delivery models as well as service quality issues. Many calls centre around case management and eligibility decisions. Efforts are aimed at resolving issues and concerns at the local level where services are delivered, in a fair and timely manner.

Communications Branch

The Communications Branch provides central communications planning, media relations, issue management, communications project management, internal communications and publications directed to clients, stakeholders, staff and the general public.

The core functions of the branch include:

- media relations, issue management and event planning support to the Minister and Ministry Executive
- strategic communications research planning and implementation and evaluation
- professional writing services
- development and production of communications materials for both print and electronic publication, including brochures, posters, newsletters, reports, audio and video tapes
- management of ministry internet communications; and
- public education and awareness projects

During 1998-1999, the branch provided public information and communications support for:

- programs to reduce the occurrence and the impacts of child poverty, including the BC Family Bonus / the National Child Benefit, Healthy Kids, the BC Earned Income Benefit and Youth Works
- BC Benefits programs such as Welfare to Work and Disability Benefits
- the introduction of a new repayment option for clients who receive the co-operative housing share purchase benefit; and
- volunteers, community development and cooperatives.

The branch developed information packages:

- to enhance internal communications among staff in headquarters divisions and through 138 offices across the province
- to enhance information to BC Benefits recipients by developing Fast Track, a guide to ministry services, for use by MLA constituency offices, anti-poverty activists and advocates and government agents
- to build public awareness of joint federal/provincial/territorial programs including the National Child Benefit, National Children's Agenda and Labour Market Development Agreement; and
- to build public awareness of the BC Family Bonus.

The branch expanded avenues of access to information, including:

- making initiatives and program information available on the internet; and
- publications with key ministry information to help participants with literacy or language challenges.

Finance and Management Services

Budgets and Financial Planning Branch

Budgets and Financial Planning Branch is primarily responsible for co-ordinating the compilation and monitoring of the ministry's budget, developing financial planning strategies to meet the ministry strategic priorities and establishing and managing effective financial and FTE reporting systems.

Financial Services Branch

The Financial Services Branch performs the ministry's financial administration and accounting functions. These include financial systems and policy, administrative and program payments, payroll, accounting and reconciliation of transactions and revenue collection. The branch ensures that ministry's systems of financial administration are compatible with the central government's systems. The branch operates from headquarters offices in Vancouver and Victoria.

The branch is responsible for processing:

- Income assistance payments (including direct payments to suppliers such as landlords and BC Hydro on behalf of participants)
- Billings from day care providers
- Payments to contractors
- Paycheques for regular and auxiliary staff
- Travel vouchers and other administrative payments
- Payments to suppliers for goods authorized to participants via Purchase Authorization Forms; and
- Payments to suppliers on behalf of participants for goods and or services authorized for health, dental and optical purposes;

Objective: ***To upgrade the Accounts Receivable software for Year 2000 compliance and to take advantage of a number of functional enhancements included in new software releases.***

Strategy: Financial Services Branch worked with the Information Technology branch over a six-month period to upgrade the accounts receivable software. After the software was installed, Financial Services staff performed extensive user-acceptance system testing, including Year 2000 specific testing prior to implementation of the program.

Results: The base software was installed in a timely, accurate manner and user-acceptance testing was completed successfully. Test results verified that the Accounts Receivable software was ready and Financial Services branch gave approval to migrate the software to production in October 1998. All security functions proceeded smoothly and the software was implemented successfully and on schedule. A post-implementation review was conducted and documentation was completed according to ministry standards.

Objective: ***To convert the ministry's Financial Management Information System accounts payable, general ledger and purchasing from an in-house system to a government-wide central accounting module in the Corporate Accounting System (CAS).***

Strategy: The conversion consisted of two phases. In the first phase, the ministry's on-line systems for accounts payable, purchasing and general ledger were converted to the government CAS system. In the second phase, batch payments for child care, purchase authorizations, and BC Benefits journal vouchers were converted to CAS.

Results: The project was completed and the ministry is now using a government-wide, centrally-based accounting system as per government mandate.

Administrative Services Branch

The branch co-ordinates ministry mail service, manages the ministry's assets (equipment, vehicles and furniture), and co-ordinates classification, retention, storage, retrieval and final disposition of ministry records. The branch co-ordinates provision of office space for the ministry. It also ensures that both staff and the public have access to the most current telephone and office location data for the ministry. The branch also is involved with ministry security procedures and business continuation planning.

Facilities/Asset and Supply Services

Objective: ***To facilitate and implement a consolidation of ministry headquarters into the Belmont Building, 614 Humboldt Street in Victoria.***

Strategy: Space planning meetings were held to identify requirements for all divisions. Options were presented to the executive. The most cost-effective and functional option was chosen.

Results: In September 1998, the ministry consolidated its policy, programs and management services headquarters divisions at 614 Humboldt Street. All headquarters Victoria operations were consolidated at 614 Humboldt Street except health services. Building occupancy costs were reduced as a result.

Objective: ***To deliver and maintain efficient, cost-effective services to the ministry in accordance with a government-wide office accommodation reduction initiative.***

Strategy: The branch consulted with BC Buildings Corporation (BCBC) to prepare projects that achieve ministry service delivery objectives while reducing the costs of improvements and ministry accommodation.

Results: Planned moves involved alternate workplace solutions thereby reducing the use of office renovations. The ministry delivered and completed 219 major moves/renovations and 112 minor improvement projects.

Objective: ***To consolidate the two locations of the Information Technology Branch in Vancouver.***

Strategy: Planning for this project commenced in September 1998. A move committee was formed and the project scope was defined. BCBC hired a planner on the ministry's behalf and a project team was to be formed to complete the planning for all five phases.

Results: The consolidation occurred in phases commencing December 1998 and concluding in February 1999. The project enhanced operational efficiencies and accommodated the branch re-organization.

Objective: ***To complete the last office closure resulting from a major downsizing initiative initiated in November 1996.***

Strategy: The branch worked to amalgamate two Richmond, BC Benefits offices.

Results: In December 1998, ministry staff simultaneously relocated to a location on Minoru Boulevard. The relocations were completed by March 31, 1999.

Vehicle Management

Objective: ***To establish an ongoing review and analysis of the ministry vehicle fleet usage. This included executive, headquarters and regional requirements, vehicle replacements and eliminations from the fleet in accordance with government policy.***

Strategy: The branch undertook province-wide co-ordination of the ministry vehicle fleet requirement plan.

Results: In 1998, the ministry replaced 26 units, eliminated 16 units and made four additions to the fleet, resulting in a fleet reduction of 12 units.

Information, Records and Forms Management Section

Objective: ***To continue to provide records management training.***

Strategy: The branch scheduled ongoing records management training at headquarters and in the regions.

Results: The training enabled staff to be more accountable for their records management practices.

Objective: ***To bring all the ministry forms up-to-date and ensure Y2K compliance.***

Strategy: A systematic approach was taken to ensure that all the ministry forms were addressed and changed, giving priority to all prescribed forms.

Results: Approximately 250 forms were changed to enable us to reprint forms using the most up-to-date format. Seventy-five forms were made obsolete by the review.

Objective: ***To continue to process client file requests made by field staff.***

Strategy: The branch customer service desk responded to fax and email requests for client files.

Results: About 2,200 client file transfers (both electronic and physical files mailed out) were processed along with an additional 250 other miscellaneous file requests.

Telephone Data Administrator (TDA)

Objective: ***To create and maintain information in the Government Telephone Directory System (GTDS) which provides updated information to the ministry's directory, the web-based government telephone directory and the annual printed BC government telephone directory.***

Strategy: In the GTDS database, office information (including staff, address, phone and fax numbers) is researched, gathered and updated to maintain the ministry's telephone directory.

Results: Accurate and current ministry staff and office information was made available to the public and staff. The Internet provided accurate and current information to the public and to all ministry staff that had access. The ministry is well-represented in the printed telephone directory.

Objective: ***To update the ministry's information in the government listings in the 'blue pages' in local telephone directories across BC.***

Strategy: Staff researched, gathered and co-ordinated information to ensure that ministry programs are represented appropriately in the local 'blue page' listings.

Results: Accurate and current information appeared in public telephone directories across the province.

Personnel Services

Within a workplace environment characterized by constant change and where quality public services are expected to be delivered with limited resources, the Personnel Services Branch helps build an effective ministry by:

- determining classification and compensation levels for ministry positions
- recruiting staff for vacant positions
- planning for future staff requirements
- arranging and/or providing training for staff that will ensure a high level of client service
- maintaining good employee relations through collective bargaining and liaison with employee organizations and by preventing harassment in the workplace
- dealing with the workforce impact of employee health
- ensuring ministry work activities are carried out is a safe manner
- promoting innovation and excellence in service by recognizing successes
- evaluating and redesigning work processes
- ensuring ministry staff are reflective of the diversity of the communities they serve; and
- promoting employment equity.

The branch consists of a headquarters office, nine regional offices and a staff training facility.

Objective: ***To ensure each job in the ministry is evaluated in a timely manner to determine its classification and compensation level.***

Strategy: The Public Service Employee Relations Commission (PSERC) holds the authority for classifying all provincial government jobs. In September 1998, the Public Service Job Evaluation Plan (PSJEP) was introduced to guide the classification of all government positions. PSERC declared its intention to delegate classification authority under PSJEP to classification specialists within individual ministries. The branch received delegation of authority in April 1999.

Results: During 1998-99, 505 classification reviews of existing positions and 274 classifications of new positions were completed, a significant increase from previous years. The Manager of Classifications and Systems was granted delegated authority shortly after the end of the 1998-99 fiscal year.

Objective: ***To improve recruitment and retention of financial assistance workers (FAW), the largest classification group in the ministry.***

Strategy: A major recruitment campaign in four regions to fill more than 100 FAW vacancies, started in February 1998 (in the previous fiscal year), was completed during 1998-99.

A review of the FAW selection process by an independent consultant during 1998-99 pointed to a need for fine-tuning the screening process, updating selection assessment material and expanding recruitment activities.

Results: The recruitment campaign attracted 1,378 applications and resulted in 101 new FAWs starting early in 1998-99. Once the positions were filled, a comprehensive training program was launched. Following the recruitment campaign, an analysis and review of the FAW recruitment process was initiated.

Objective: ***To make it faster and easier for applicants to receive information on ministry job competitions.***

Strategy: An automated 'Fax-on-Demand' system introduced in June 1998 enables applicants to receive detailed job descriptions and requirements, and general recruitment information within hours, and to leave fax information as well. Callers without faxes can receive information by mail.

Results: The system, which received about 3,200 calls per month in a three-month period, is providing faster response to applicants and saving administrative time. There is ongoing review of the system to ensure better customer service is provided.

Objective: ***To accurately reflect the number of positions vacant in the ministry.***

Strategy: The number of reported vacancies in August 1998 stood at 381. The Personnel Branch embarked on a project to review and identify true vacancies.

Results: As of March 31, 1999, there were 260 positions vacant, a reduction of almost a third of the vacancies.

Objective: ***To ensure ministry staff are reflective of the diversity of the communities they serve, including the designated groups—Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and women—and to promote employment equity.***

Strategy: Ministry senior management supported employment equity during the year. Employment equity goals were included in business plans and the deputy minister requested regional executive officers appoint 'best practices designates' to champion equity in each region. In addition, all members of the ministry executive agreed to volunteer as mentors for a mentoring program.

Four workshops conducted in 1998-99 dealt with employment equity issues such as accommodation of individuals within the designated groups (for managers and supervisors), public service staffing policies (for designated group employees who may sit on selection panels) and disability issues in the workplace (five sessions involving a total of 100 line staff). The ministry also funded attendance of five managers and supervisors at each of two employment equity forums.

The ministry reviewed the recruitment exam to identify hidden barriers and cultural bias.

Results: The ministry reached its overall employment equity goals during 1998-99, with 263 regular employees and 344 auxiliaries hired among designated groups from January 1998 to January 1999. Except for people with disabilities, the ministry is hiring designated group individuals at a higher rate than they are leaving.

To improve employee retention among designated groups, the manager for diversity collected information and ideas from individual employees. Regional and headquarters senior management are exploring ways of achieving more consistent promotion rates for designated group employees.

Objective: To increase awareness among ministry staff of cultural diversity within the community.

Strategy: During 1998-99, eight multiculturalism workshops attracted 345 participants. They included presentations from ethnic communities, workshops on Aboriginal awareness and courses on 'culturally responsive services' and 'welcoming and valuing diversity.' In addition to the workshops, seven district offices reported spontaneous events like potluck luncheons and evening socials to celebrate cultural differences. The ministry also published a diversity poster—***Give Respect, Get Respect. We all smile in the same language***—and published its diversity policy as a brochure for all new employees. An electronic bulletin board was also created to provide employees with a source of information on diversity projects and issues.

Results: Awareness of cultural diversity has been enhanced within the ministry during 1998-99. Two regional executive officers also began including diversity issues as a standing agenda item for management meetings.

Objective: To provide training for staff that will ensure quality client service

Strategy: Employee training has become an increasingly critical issue for government organizations which are being asked to provide a high level of quality service with limited resources in an era of diminishing budgets and accelerating change. During 1998-99, 549 ministry employees participated in 20 training sessions provided by the branch training unit. The workshops focussed on

resolution, mediation, creative problem-solving, supervisor training, the process of change, ergonomics, occupational health and safety, contract management, media training and training for verification officers.

Results: Service quality was enhanced as a result of employee training.

Objective: To maintain good employee relations.

Strategy: During 1998-99, the employee relations unit designed four mini-modules to provide supervisors and managers with personnel management skills necessary for effective management of their human resources. The mini-modules covered orientation, probation, discipline and performance management.

During 1998-99, the unit trained Level 1 and 2 discrimination and harassment complaint investigators. The unit also took part in designing harassment prevention awareness training for all employees.

Results: Management remained committed to problem-solving and effective communication with the union and employees. A third of grievances during 1998 were resolved at step 2 of the grievance procedure.

Training for discrimination and harassment investigators was done to ensure the ministry had enough resources to investigate complaints of harassment.

Objective: To improve the effectiveness of ministry offices by identifying and resolving factors which impact employee performance and relationships.

Strategy: In May 1998, a health program pilot project was initiated in Region 2 to reduce the effect of medical conditions, relationship problems, adverse behaviours and poor performance on ministry operations. The pilot introduced a proactive approach in addressing issues prior to the occurrence of sick leave. The focus was to increase communication between supervisors and employees and to accommodate individual requirements. The program employs a step-by-step case management model for identifying, addressing and resolving difficulties employees experience which are affecting their work. Supervisors received training on this model and have been provided with ongoing mentorship.

Results: The pilot was fully implemented in October 1998. Since its inception, the region reported a reduction in the use of sick leave and, in stress related cases, there has been an increasing number of interventions and accommodations. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the pilot process is ongoing.

Objective: ***To ensure ministry work activities are carried out in a safe manner.***

Strategy: During 1998-99, branch staff participated in a review of safety procedures for 'out-of-office' visits by ministry staff in the course of their work. The sub-committee recommended ministry staff entering client property need to:

- assess risk factors, such as animals, unsafe buildings, signs of illegal activity, isolation and accessibility, before going to the property
- observe the risk factors on approaching the property
- at the door, assess the client's demeanour, interior risks to health and other factors, and ask permission before entering; and
- once inside, try to allow for an unobstructed exit, and practice common sense and courtesy to avoid conflict where possible.

The sub-committee also made recommendations on keeping accurate records of visits and reporting concerns or incidents of violence.

Results: The recommendations were to be used as a guideline for regions in making their own plans for conducting safe 'out-of-office' visits.

Strategy: The safety program was also involved in the preparation and delivery of training in ergonomics for staff involved in conducting ergonomics assessments and making adjustments to employee work stations.

Results: The establishment of regional and divisional joint safety teams, together with annual safety events and a safety newsletter, has provided the ministry with a functional, decentralized safety program able to manage workplace safety and ensure compliance with WCB regulations.

Objective: ***To promote innovation and service excellence by recognizing ministry employees.***

Strategy: The branch, on behalf of the ministry, recognizes employees through participation in the government-wide Employee Recognition Program (ERP) and the Long Service Awards hosted annually at Government House. In 1998-99, a group of ministry employees developed the ministry's own recognition program–the One of A Kind (OAK) Award. The OAK award recognizes staff for individual and team service excellence with clients and colleagues, as well as for years of public service.

Results: During 1998-99, the government-wide ERP recognized 56 ministry employees who came up with innovative solutions to improve service or the work environment, and awarded them a total of $42,727 in 10 awards. One suggestion involving a team of 15 ministry employees netted a cost saving in excess of $1 million. The team's collective award was $28,000. The total estimated saving through ideas and innovations of ministry employees during 1998-99 totalled $1.3 million.

Information Technology Branch

The Information Technology Branch:

- identifies, develops, implements and operates information technology systems that meet the business requirements of the ministry, consistent with government-wide design standards; and
- applies sound, established information management practices to enable the ministry to manage its information resources effectively.

Objective: ***To implement electronic mail to approximately 700 users at various locations, including the headquarters office in Victoria (the Belmont Building), the Information Technology Branch office in Vancouver, the Health Services Branch (Victoria), the Staff Training Branch (Richmond) and nine regional offices throughout the province.***

Strategy: The project was jointly managed by Information Technology Services Division, part of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and this ministry. All workstations were upgraded to the Windows-based program Outlook 98 and all staff were trained on the product. Ministry staff will access the MS Exchange server through the Metropolitan Area Network (MAN), a government-wide server, and high-speed communication lines.

Results: All headquarters and regional staff are now able to share documents and calendaring systems.

Objective: ***To move Office Vision, the mainframe email system and other applications from the mainframe computer operated by the ministry at 590 West 8th in Vancouver to the shared government computing facility at 4000 Seymour in Victoria to reduce costs.***

Strategy: ITB and Victoria staff worked together to ensure that the applications could run on the new machine in Victoria.

Results: The system was successfully moved in December 1998 and the ministry mainframe computer was removed in January 1999.

Objective: ***To ensure that the ministry's systems and processes do not fail when the year 2000 arrives.***

Strategy: The rewriting and upgrading of programs and data in the BC Benefits system (approx. 1.5 million lines of program code) were completed in the fall of 1998. The conversion of other ministry applications, such as Office Vision, was accomplished in-house and completed in the spring of 1999. A project management office was established to ensure no changes were made to systems

which would introduce new Y2K problems. Business continuation planning for all hazards, including Y2K-related failures, was assigned to ITB's Business Systems Management group.

Results: The conversion effort for the mainframe-based systems was completed during the year. The ministry participated in a pilot program of verification and validation of program code sponsored by the government's Y2K Task Force (Action 2000). Plans for testing and support, including business continuation planning, continued during the year.

Objective: ***To provide access to the Corporate Human Resource Information and Payroll System (CHIPS) for regional offices and regional personnel offices in six regions, so regional personnel staff do not have to contact headquarters for employee information.***

Strategy: Local area networks (LANs) were installed in the regional offices and regional personnel offices in six regions. All workstations in these offices were upgraded to the ministry's current standard configuration (Windows 95, Office 97, Outlook 98 and Internet Explorer 4.0). Staff were provided with training on Windows 95, Office 97 and Outlook 98.

Results: All regional office staff are now able to share documents, applications, and peripherals such as printers